

Ambassador of Sweden to UNESCO Mats Ringborg
Remarks at the Inauguration of the
Exhibition on Press Freedom and the Safety of Journalists
UNESCO, October 29, 2008

Mr Director General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In January this year, the Swedish Delegation presented a proposal to Unesco that a photo exhibition should be arranged on violence against journalists. We proposed that the exhibition should include, among other things, pictures of murdered journalists and of Unesco press freedom prize laureates.

The idea was to highlight Unesco's role in this very important field, to increase awareness and visibility, and to send a very strong message of condemnation by showing faces and telling the stories of individual journalists who have been killed because they wanted to tell the truth.

I am extremely pleased that this exhibition will now be opened, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Unesco Secretariat - Mr Matsuura, Mr Kahn, Mr Schmidt, Mme Coudray, and all the others who have been involved in this project. And of course a very special thanks to Reuters – I don't think that Unesco could have found a better partner.

I would also like to thank my EU colleagues, who supported the idea from the outset. And a very special thanks also to the Ambassador of Colombia, who also gave his support, rapidly and strongly.

In a way, to kill a journalist is not just an ordinary crime, if there is such a thing as an ordinary crime. It is a threat to democracy and a violation of a basic human right.

So I hope this exhibition will have an impact, and that it will be shown in many countries.

I am very pleased to note that the exhibition will be shown in Quatar next year, in connexion with the press freedom day on 3 May.

According to Freedom House's 2007 World Press Freedom Survey, out of the 19 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, 1 is classified as free and 2 as partly free. The remaining 16 countries in this region are classified as not free. This is a serious situation, from the point of view of human rights and also from the point of view of development prospects.

Mr Director General, in about a year's time we will have to appoint your successor. I would like to use this opportunity to state that the new Director General of Unesco must be a person who is as firmly and strongly committed to human rights and to freedom of expression and freedom of the press as you are.

Thank you again for having acted so swiftly on our proposal and thank you also for having invited me to speak on this occasion.